A UNIQUE FIGURE OF BODHISATTVA AVALOKITEŚVARA.

By
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While exploring the ancient sites in the vicinity of Rājagṛiha, the author got an opportunity to visit a village named Ghosarawan which is situated eight miles east of Nālandā and seven miles south-east of Bihar-sharif in the district of Patna (Bihar). Ghosarawan which was once the site of a Buddhist monastery in the early mediaeval period has now turned into a small village with humble dwellings. The vestiges that have come to light from the ruins of the monastery in the form of brick structures, inscriptions and sculptures are very interesting from archaeological as well as historical view points. Above all the sculptures of this place are particularly interesting from iconographic point of view.

All the sculptures discovered so far have been collected and kept at different points in the village. Some of them have found places inside the houses of the villagers where they are worshipped and venerated as Gṛihadevatās.

The majority of the sculptures are in black basalt stone and represent the Gods of the Buddhist pantheon. Outstanding amongst them is an image of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara,[1] seen from an iconographic point of view.

This image is 5 ft. in height and 2.4 ft. in breadth and is in a fair state of preservation. The figure is in high relief and stands on a double lotus throne. The top portion of the stele looks like an arch. There is an oval shaped halo round the head of Avalokiteśvara. The figures of five Dhyāni Buddhas have been executed in the back ground. One Dhyāni Buddha is on the top of the halo, two of them have been placed on either side of the head of the main figure. The other two Dhyani Buddhas can be seen in between the right and left hands. This Avalokiteśvara has one face and twelve hands and wears a jaṭāmukuṭa (crown of the matted hair) adorned with the effigy of Dhyāni Buddha Amitābha on his head.

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1. See Plate no. I.

The presence of Amitābha on the crown suggests that he is none but Avalokiteśvara. The curls of the hair hang over both the shoulders. The figure is decked with ornaments A beautifully carved necklace round the neck, armlets in one of the right and left arms and bangles in almost all the arms add to the grace and charm of the figure. Out of the six right hands three are raised upwards and the rest three hang downwards. Such is the case with the six left hands also. The features of the left and right arms are as follows :

Left arms	*Right arms*
(1) Abhaya mudrā	(1) Lotus stalk
(2) Snake tail in between thumb and index finger.	(2) Sword
(3) Rosary	(3) Cornucopiae
(4) Varada mudrā	(4) Kamaṇḍala (water vessel)
(5) Varada mudrā	(5) Book
(6) Varada mudrā	(6) Elephant goad

The sacred thread across the left shoulder hangs below the waist. The portion from the waist to the heel is covered with a close fitted garment (*dhotī*), the folds of which hang down in between the two legs. Below are the two minor deities on either side of the main figure but they are mutilated and hence they cannot be identified easily. It is probable that they are Hayagriva and Bhṛikuṭi.

From the style of modelling and the material the image seems to belong to the 10th-11th century A. D. Curiously enough, the features shown in this image have not been met with in any of the forms of Avalokiteśvara discovered so far.

The conception of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara was brought into Buddhist pantheon by the Mahāsaṅghikas in the time of Aśoka. In Mahāvastu Avadāna[2] which is the work of the Mahāsaṅghikas, Avalokiteśvara is described as Bhagavāna (God) whose duty is to look round for instructing people for constant walfare. One of the passages of Karandavyūha[3] informs us that Avalokiteśvara can take the shape of all gods of all religions in order to impart Dharma. Naturally, the possibility of various forms of representing Avalokiteśvara can not be ruled out.

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2. Senart : *Le Mahāvastu*, vol. II, p. 294.
3. *Karandavyūha*, ed. Samasrami, pp. 21-22.



Image of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara from Ghosarawan
(10th-11th century A. D.)

Standard works on Indian Buddhist Iconography written by distinguished scholars like Dr. Benoytosh Bhattacharya, N. K. Bhattasali and R. D. Banerjea are available to us but none of them seem to have come across Avalokiteśvara in the form described here.

Dr. Bhattacharya's book "The Indian Buddhist Iconography" is largely based on tantric works like Sādhanamālā and Nispannayogavali, which refers to fifteen forms of Avalokiteśvara which have been identified on the basis of the Sādhanas given in the Sādhanamālā. But evidence of 108 forms of Avalokiteśvara has been obtained from one of the monasteries known as Macchandar Vahal, Kathamandu in Nepal. These 108 forms are available in paintings executed on wooden panel which adore the main temple on three sides[4].

From the Sādhanas given in the Sādhanamālā it appears that the number of hands of Avalokiteśvara varied from two to eighteen and each of the hands had distinctive features. Here we are only concerned with that form of Avalokiteśvara which has twelve hands because the Avalokiteśvara described in this article has twelve hands. A critical examination of the forms of Avalokiteśvara having twelve hands will make it clear that this particular type of Avalokiteśvara is different from those already known to us (See Plate no. 1)

Out of the fifteen forms described by Dr. Bhattacharya in his book, only one form "Māyājālakrama" has twelve hands but five faces. The attributes in the right and left hands are the following :

Right hands	*Left hands*
(1) Damaru	(1) Raised index finger
(2) Khatavanga	(2) Kapala
(3) Goad	(3) Red lotus
(4) Noose	(4) Jewel
(5) Vajra	(5) Discus
(6) Arrow	(6) Bow

In the Indian Museum Collection[5] there are two figures of Avalokiteśvara having twelve hands and one face, one of the figures displays the following attributes in the right and left arms :

4. *Indian Buddhist Iconography*, p. 125.
5. *Eastern Indian School of mediæval Sculpture*, p. 88.

Right hands	*Left hands*
(1) Rosary	(1) Book
(2) Tarjani mudrā	(2) Goad
(3) Indistinct	(3) Snare
(4) Lotus	(4) Lotus
(5) Abhaya mudrā	(5) Jewel
(6) Varada mudrā	(6) Water vessel

The attributes shown in this form are quite different from the Avalokiteśvara of this article.

Dr. Bhattacharya has published the eye copy of paintings of 108 forms of Avalokiteśvara discoverd in Nepal in his book in the form of appendix. In the whole lot only three figures 5, 15 and 35 (the serial number of figures as given in the appendix) have twelve hands and they are known as (1) Māyājālakrama Lokeśvara, (2) Māyājālakrama Krodha Lokeśvara and Vajrahuṁṭikā Lokeśvara. The first two Lokeśvaras have five faces each and the last has only one face. Here their features as given by Dr. Bhattacharya are described below :

(1) Māyājālakrama Lokeśvara :

"He has five faces and twelve arms. The head on the top probably represents Amitābha. He stands in the Alidha attitude, and wears the tiger skin and the garlands of heads, but his faces do not present a fearful appearance. The six right hands carry the Tridaṇḍi, the Khatavanga, the jewel, the khaḍaga, the vajra and the rosary, and the six left show the noose, the kapala, the utpala, the fruit, the cakra and the lotus".

(2) Māyājālakrama Krodha Lokeśvara :

"He presents a very fierce appearance with five faces terrible with protruding teeth, and eyes rolling in anger. His hair rises upwards like flames of fire. He stands in pratyalidha attitude and wears the tiger skin. He has twelve arms, of which the six right carry the sword, the vajra, the goad, the noose, the trisula and the arrow, and the six left hold the shield, the cakra, the jewel, the deer skin, the kapala and the Tarjjani-with the noose".

(3) Vajrahuṁṭika Lokeśvara :

"He is one faced and twelve armed and stands in Ardhaparyanka in dancing attitude on a lotus. He holds the utpala in all his twelve hands."

The first two Lokeśvaras stand in Alidha and pratyalidha attitude and the features in their hands are not like that of the Avalokiteśvara described here. The last Lokeśvara though one faced and twelve handed, stands in dancing pose and holds utpala in all his hands.

The Avalokiteśvara of this article does not present a fierce look and does not wear garland of heads. Three of his right hands are in varada mudrās and one of the left arms hold cornucopiae. These features have not been seen in any of the forms of Avalokiteśvara Hence these qualities make it sufficiently clear that this Avalokiteśvara is quite unique.